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Improving JPME through Interschool Collaboration

By BERT L. FRANDSEN

Students participate in Command and General Staff College Joint Advanced Warfighting Studies exercise Caspian Guard, 2006



The Fort Leavenworth Lamp (Prudence Siebert)

The degree of interaction among the intermediate colleges might be compared to that between the Services before the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act. Each college is so busy meeting its own requirements that meaningful collaboration with its sister Service schools is almost too hard to attempt.

To be fair, the biggest challenge for curriculum designers is not filling the academic calendar. Each college must satisfy a variety of outside authorities who provide guidance and levy educational taskings. Indeed, fitting all of these requirements into the educational program, some of them changing from year to year, can be frustrating to say the least. Understandably, a high degree of resistance exists to outside initiatives.

More to the point, even though each intermediate institution has a joint exercise program, it has proven impossible to link them in a truly joint exercise. Instead, the colleges' usual practice is to simulate the other Service components, sometimes tasking the small number of sister Service students assigned to the institution to portray their parent Service. This approach is problematic; while these sister Service students may indeed be tactically and technically competent in their own Services, few have received the in-depth schooling relevant to

the operational level of war that is part of the intermediate education experience. Nor have they had the advantage of the comprehensive midcareer Service indoctrination that occurs at the command and staff colleges.

In spite of such obstacles, the Army Command and General Staff College (CGSC) and the Air Command and Staff College (ACSC) are attempting to introduce a new level of joint collaboration. In March 2008, the schools teamed up to conduct a third annual joint planning exercise, commonly referred to as the Intermediate Level Education Joint Exercise. Such collaborative events represent a significant step forward for joint professional military education.

This joint exercise program, however, was started on the initiative of each school's senior leadership. As we all know, the long-term viability of such internal initiatives, no matter how enlightened, is at risk as personalities and conditions change. Indeed, such initiatives usually give way to higher priority requirements when resource constraints tighten. Consequently, it has been difficult to expand this exercise beyond a relatively small percentage of students at each institution, and it has proven impossible to expand the exercise to include students at the College of Naval Command and Staff and the Marine Corps Command and Staff College.

This article describes this innovative joint exercise program, explains its benefits, and offers a way ahead. Moreover, it suggests that a joint exercise program at the intermediate Service college level has the potential to improve joint professional intermediate education and thereby improve overall American military effectiveness.

The impetus for collaboration among the intermediate colleges surfaced at a four-star inter-Service training summit hosted at Fort Leavenworth in February 2005. Admiral Edmund Giambastiani, then-commander, U.S. Joint Forces Command (USJFCOM), and the senior training and education officers of each Service attended. Subsequently, the Army Command and General Staff College's Brigadier General Volney Warner invited his fellow commandants to have their schools participate in a joint planning exercise.

It is important to note that General Warner's proposed joint exercise, while valuable in its own right, was to be a vehicle to stimulate further collaboration among the schools. Such collaboration could have many other positive effects as faculty share ideas about their educational mission. After all, the intermediate colleges are all tasked with meeting the same joint professional military education objectives and learning areas. Collaboration among

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professional educators oriented on similar objectives ought to raise the overall quality of joint professional military education.

General Warner succeeded in convincing the commandants of the Army, Navy, and Air command and staff colleges to conduct a one-joint task force (JTF) proof of concept exercise in March 2006. The exercise succeeded and generated commitments from the Army and Air Force colleges for expansion. An expanded three-JTF exercise, involving 150 students from ACSC and 220 from CGSC, was conducted in March 2007. Both schools conducted a similar exercise again in March 2008.

collaboration among professional educators oriented on similar objectives ought to raise the overall quality of joint professional military education

This is not the first time the Army and Air command and staff colleges have engaged in a joint exercise program, illustrating the risks inherent in the long-term viability of such initiatives. During the late 1990s, both schools participated in a computer adjudicated wargame known as *Prairie Warrior*. Because it was an execution exercise, *Prairie Warrior* suffered a problem also experienced at the National Training Center (NTC) at Fort Irwin, California, during that era. Neither Service could operate at its full potential in Fort Irwin's battlespace without creating an unsatisfactory learning situation for the other Service.

This "NTC conundrum" meant that airpower had to be unrealistically constrained in *Prairie Warrior*; otherwise, the Air Force's capability to destroy conventional enemy forces would result in Army students not having a challenging, stressful, force-on-force experience. As a result, *Prairie Warrior* died in 2001; it simply was unable to serve the educational objectives of both schools.

A properly designed *planning* exercise, however, can resolve the conundrum because a planning exercise can challenge the full capabilities of each Service. Also, as has been underscored by recent operations, much planning remains to be done beyond the destruction of the enemy's conventional military power to achieve our nation's strategic objectives. Indeed, after two iterations of the contemporary joint exercise, both the Army and Air Force command and staff colleges are satisfied with the overall construct and its ability to meet both institutions' educational objectives.

In the 2007 joint exercise, the students formed the planning staffs of three JTFs. Two were headquartered at Fort Leavenworth and one at Maxwell Air Force Base. Each of these JTFs had its full complement of Service component headquarters. CGSC students at Fort Leavenworth formed the land and special operations components for each JTF, while ACSC students at Maxwell formed the air components.

Due to scheduling difficulties, the Navy and Marine Corps staff colleges were not able to participate. Consequently, Navy students assigned to Fort Leavenworth formed a maritime component and response cell for the JTFs

headquartered at CGSC. Meanwhile, Air University's senior naval advisor formed a response cell for the JTF headquarters at Maxwell.

USJFCOM's Standing Joint Force Headquarters provided Information Workstation (a collaborative planning software used in many combatant commands), which enabled most of the students to remain at home station. This feature makes the exercise affordable and more realistic, as Service component headquarters rarely are geographically collocated. Each headquarters also maintained a common operational picture thanks to the Marine Corps Command and Control Personal Computer program. Additionally, each school exchanged 20 students and 2 faculty members. These personnel replicated such doctrinal liaison units as the air component coordination elements, battlefield coordination detachments, and special operations liaison elements.

Sending 20 students and 2 faculty members on temporary duty assignments from each college was one of the more expensive features of the exercise. Even though the exercise could be conducted without such an exchange, all agreed that it was worth the cost. Students coming from their own Service's intermediate education college have been imbued with the latest Service culture, doctrine, and perspectives on the operational level of war. Therefore, they are better equipped to represent their Service's component headquarters in the JTF.

Each JTF and its components engaged in a 5-day crisis action planning exercise, which began with a warning order and finished with a course of action decision briefing at each headquarters—the

deliverable was a Commander's Estimate. The scenario, set in the Caucasus in the year 2013, has been used at CGSC for several years. In it, U.S. European Command (USEUCOM) forms a JTF to deter a fictional country, Ahurastan, from invading Azerbaijan, and to defeat it if necessary. The JTF joint operational area encompasses Georgia, Azerbaijan, Ahurastan, Turkey, and a large portion of the Black Sea.

The scenario educates students about an area with strategic significance because of the oil resources of the Caspian Sea region and the existence of various real ethnic tensions. Since the exercise is unclassified, it allows international officer students at the colleges to participate as coalition partners, some in key planning positions. The exercise name, *Operation Caspian Guard*, takes its name from the USEUCOM security cooperation plan for the region.

A significant innovation in 2007, controversial in some quarters, was having senior mentors instead of students play the role of JTF commanders. Initially, there was some skepticism about using senior mentors as commanders because it would deprive each JTF of an important student leadership position. Some were also concerned about the negative impact that such senior participants might have on the educational atmosphere.

The loss of one student leadership position in each JTF, however, out of the many other leadership positions available proved to be inconsequential. Moreover, having retired three- and four-star generals as JTF commanders increased the realism for the students and provided them valuable experience interacting with senior officers. It also gave the senior mentors, who are among the most knowledgeable and experienced officers in the joint educational community, an opportunity to ensure that doctrinal concepts and processes were being properly applied. Finally, playing the role of JTF commander provided the senior mentors a position in the exercise that actually increased their coaching opportunities because the commander is the focus of everyone's attention and controls the tempo of the planning. Faculty and students agreed that having the senior mentors as JTF commanders was helpful.

A Joint Interagency Coordination Group (JIACG) was formed at CGSC to support the exercise. It consisted of approximately 12 representatives of various non-DOD organizations. It included a former Ambassador to countries in the region and representatives from the Department of State, U.S. Agency for International Development, Federal Bureau of Investigation,

and nongovernmental organizations. The JTF at Maxwell coordinated with the JIACG through video teleconference. It was an eye-opening experience for many students and proved so beneficial that plans called for the 2008 iteration of the exercise to also include a JIACG at Maxwell.

Conducting collaborative, parallel planning in a truly joint environment, one with all Service components present, is indeed challenging. Differing Service perspectives and cultures, inevitable communications problems, and pressure of meeting deadlines—in collaborating and influencing the joint force commander's planning process as well as the parallel planning for one's own component—add a degree of realistic complexity beyond that of most other schoolhouse exercises.

More importantly, by engaging our students in a truly joint experiential learning environment, we better instill collaboration among Service components as a shared value in joint operations planning. Planners will instinctively alert the other components at mission receipt, instead of later in the process as occurred during Operation *Anaconda*. For these reasons, a joint collaborative planning exercise would make an ideal capstone exercise at the end of the normal academic year—around late May or early June for all intermediate Service colleges.

A capstone exercise would provide a degree of scheduling certainty needed for a joint exercise program involving all of the intermediate level education institutions. Scheduling the exercise at the end of the normal school year would also ensure that all participants have finished their joint professional military education subjects, and thus be prepared for an advanced crisis action planning exercise. Due to multiple start times at the Army and Navy command and staff colleges, such an end-of-year joint exercise might not be possible for all classes of students. But each school does have a class that graduates around June.

One of the main obstacles to a joint capstone exercise is synchronizing the schedules among the intermediate Service colleges. A horizontal agreement among schools is a risky endeavor for curriculum planners for reasons mentioned above. The senior Service colleges have had some success with horizontal agreements for the Joint Land, Aerospace, and Sea Simulation (JLASS), but for most of the colleges it involves only a relatively small percentage of students—about 20 to 25 students each from the Army and Air war colleges, for example. Notably, though, all 16 of the Marine Corps



Students discuss issues during Joint Advanced Warfighting Studies exercise, 2007

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having retired three- and four-star generals as JTF commanders increased the realism for the students and provided them valuable experience interacting with senior officers

Command and Staff College students participated in the last JLASS.

The intermediate colleges could pursue a joint exercise using JLASS as a model, but a more transformational approach would be a large-scale capstone exercise involving a significant proportion of each school's student body. Unfortunately, a large-scale capstone exercise, one that includes enough students to have an impact on the joint community, is unlikely to happen unless an honest broker takes charge.

USJFCOM, in its role as joint force trainer, would seem to be the appropriate honest broker. Its Joint Warfighting Center has an experienced staff of exercise planners and superb senior mentors. Its role could be limited to coordinating the schedule among the schools and providing enabling resources, such as collaboration tools and senior mentors. Such a limitation would lessen the burden on USJFCOM's already full plate and allow the intermediate level schools to take care of most of the exercise planning. Including USJFCOM senior mentors, though, would provide a bridge between the

operational and educational worlds and help transfer lessons learned in war to educational institutions and their students, who will soon graduate and become joint warfare practitioners.

There is fear among some intermediate level educators that allowing USJFCOM to involve itself in an intermediate level education exercise would be akin to allowing the proverbial camel's nose into the tent. USJFCOM, they argue, might exploit the exercise for its own ends, turning it into an experimentation lab for the latest draft joint operations concepts. Indeed, the educators' fear of losing control of the curriculum is based on their past experience, as they seek to balance competing requirements for change against the stability needed in their programs to ensure high quality instruction.

On the other hand, could not enlightened engagement by the combatant command responsible for joint force training significantly improve joint professional military education? Could not the same benefits coming from collaboration between intermediate colleges, which General Warner envisioned, also accrue with collaboration between the schools and the operational world through USJFCOM's involvement?

Without an influential honest broker, it is unlikely that all of the intermediate Service colleges will engage in a collaborative planning exercise with a significant level of participation. The benefits of a truly joint planning exercise among the intermediate schools—benefits in realism, student motivation, interaction with students from other Service colleges, and the unanticipated beneficial effects that would result from faculty collaboration among the institutions—will probably not occur without an honest broker. Like the Services before Goldwater-Nichols, significant change is not likely to take place unless directed by a higher authority. And because of the risks involved in taking such a bold step forward, all of the intermediate colleges are not likely to do it on their own. A leader is needed.

A joint exercise program at the intermediate service college level has the potential to significantly improve intermediate joint professional military education and, thereby, overall American military effectiveness. As the revolution in information technology annihilates the old barriers of time and space that separated our educational institutions, there is one thing that can be predicted with a fair degree of certainty. Someday, its time will come. How long it will take is the question.

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